

Army Corps of Engineers (see Figure 3.5.1). A small area in the western part of the southernmost wash was also defined as a jurisdictional wetland based on the vegetation present.

3.6 Cultural Resources

For the proposed project, record searches and field surveys were conducted for a study area 2,150 feet wide centered on the existing SDG&E 230 kV transmission line. A report on the intensive pedestrian cultural resource survey is attached to this EA as confidential Appendix D. The discussion of cultural resources in this EA is based on that report.

The project area is rich in cultural resource sites and is designated by the BLM in the Desert Plan as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. This designation is related to both environmental and cultural resources. The study area generally parallels and partly contains remnants of ancient Lake Cahuilla, a large, shallow, fresh-water lake. This ancient lake was formed by overflow episodes of the Colorado River into what is now the Salton Basin and Imperial Valley. While freshwater influxes from the Colorado River into the Salton Trough occurred sporadically since Pleistocene times, the relatively dense concentration of archaeological resources in the study area appears to be associated with at least four lacustrine episodes that occurred within the past 2,000 years. These archaeological resources are concentrated on a segment of the ancient shoreline near the 40-foot contour above mean sea level.

Because of the general lack of potable water sources and overall low resource potential in the Yuha desert, permanent human habitation of the West Mesa area must have been dependent on the careful use of reliable water catchment areas and proven travel routes. In such a marginal environment, human population concentrations or settlement nodes would necessarily center on stable sources of water. Thus, the presence of a large, fresh-water source in this arid environment presented prehistoric peoples with a valuable resource, and accounts for the relative abundance of cultural resource sites along what was once the shoreline of Lake Cahuilla.

Site record information from the Southeastern Information Center indicates that 30 recorded sites and 28 isolates are plotted within the study area. The site record forms for these sites were reviewed prior to commencement of the survey fieldwork. The relocation of these sites was considered to be a priority of the current study.

A BLM Class III survey of the defined study area was completed for the proposed project in March 2001. The primary goal of the intensive pedestrian survey was to identify, record, and inventory all cultural resource sites, features, and isolates of prehistoric and historic age within the study area. Twenty-six prehistoric sites and one historic site were identified. This number includes nine previously recorded and relocated sites. All of the